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*Thus Sayeth the Matthean Lord:  
Exploring the Intersection of the Quest for the  
Historical Jesus and the Proclamation of the  
Biblical Jesus*

**Abstract:**

The themes of Biblical Studies and mission meet in a significant way at the intersection of the quest for the historical Jesus (an aspect of biblical studies) and the proclamation of the biblical Jesus (an aspect of the mission of the Church). This intersection undoubtedly occurs in the context we currently find ourselves, the evangelical seminary setting. This paper explores a passage, Matthew 4:1–11, that has both significant theological content but also some rather difficult historical issues. When confronted with this type of problem, is it possible to navigate the passage in such a way that the historical Jesus and the theological Christ remain recognizable to one another? How can we best teach this passage, and others like it, to our students who will subsequently be preaching it in their own churches? The hope is that the conclusions set forth in this paper will provide a way forward, but also open up a discussion that will yield even more acute directives for those forced to handle this issue in the future. This paper was presented at the Asbury Advanced Research Program Interdisciplinary Colloquium for 2017 on Biblical Studies and the Mission of the Church.

**Keywords:** historical Jesus, theological Christ, temptation narrative, biblical studies, Christology

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## Introduction

In the process of doing research for this project I came across an interesting essay by James Carleton Paget titled, "The Religious Authority of Albert Schweitzer's Jesus."<sup>1</sup> In it he portrays a Schweitzer who appears to have quite divergent approaches when it comes to how he understands and relates to the figure of Jesus. Schweitzer understood Jesus to be a man, nothing more, void of the divine status so often attributed him in the Gospels; Jesus's "thoroughgoing eschatology" was ill-conceived and ultimately wrong; and Schweitzer even thought that Jesus's existence was not of central importance to the Christian faith. He writes, "Modern Christianity must always reckon with the possibility of having to abandon the historical figure of Jesus. Hence it must not artificially increase his importance by referring all theological knowledge to him and developing a christocentric religion: the Lord may always be a mere element in religion, but should never be considered its foundation."<sup>2</sup> Yet, in spite of this, Schweitzer relates to Jesus in a seemingly entirely different fashion. It is no secret the length of time he spent serving those in need through medical missions under the direction of the Paris Missionary Society. In 1905, very near to the time he published *Von Remairus zu Wrede*, he writes this to the then director of the Society prior to embarking on the mission, "I have become ever simpler, more and more a child and I have begun to realize increasingly clearly that the only truth and the only happiness lie in serving Jesus Christ there where he needs us."<sup>3</sup> Additionally, in correspondence with his wife around that same time, he writes the following upon spending some time gazing at what is known as the Christ-Medal, "I look at this so often, this medal ... It is remarkable to look at a man and to know that one is his slave."<sup>4</sup>

Schweitzer, in my opinion, is an outlier. This may be an obvious statement given his two PhDs and his MD, published works in philosophy, music composition, and theology, the fact that he started and maintained a hospital in Africa, and won the Nobel Peace Prize. But, those are not the things I have in mind when I say "outlier" in this specific context. What I mean here is that, as a historian he felt it is his duty to reduce, if not remove altogether, much of what he assumed to be theological overlay that had come to encase the historical Jesus, but as a Christ-follower, no matter how liberal his leanings, he felt the need to serve that same reductionist version of Jesus with an obedience that rivals, if not surpasses, many in the pews of our more "conservative" churches. This, in my opinion, is not the norm. I venture to say that those without the philosophical aptitude of a

Schweitzer are not necessarily capable of crafting a worldview that features a Christianity in which Jesus has such little historical representation and value, yet simultaneously places him on a pedestal as one to emulate and serve. The reality is that, for the average person in the pew, the portrait of Jesus that the individual has created, or at least had created for them, and the extent to which that portrait reflects what they consider to be historical reality is often directly related to the authoritative place Jesus holds in that person's life.

Is authority really dependent upon historicity? Are the two actually intertwined in the minds of those who attend the churches and the seminaries that we are collectively leading? The answer to both of these questions, at least on some level, is yes. I recognize that this partly an assumption, but the assumption is based on personal experience. Throughout my academic journey, specifically over the past few years in the course of pursuing my Ph.D., I have had times where portions of the biblical Jesus were discarded because I was unsure of the historical veracity of a given text. To borrow a phrase from Schweitzer, some of Jesus's greatest sayings were left "lying in a corner like explosive shells from which the charges [had] been removed."<sup>5</sup> The result was an impotent Jesus with little force behind some of his most discomfoting ethical imperatives or intended mind-altering teachings. In a purely academic environment maybe this is of little consequence, but this is not the context in which I find myself currently or will most likely find myself after graduation. To be perfectly honest, it matters to me whether or not Jesus said this or did that. It has implications for how I live my life both personally and professionally. I have yet to craft, nor do I care to craft, a philosophical system where Jesus remains an inspirational and authoritative figure in my life if the extant witnesses to him are shown to be of little historical value, especially to the extent which Schweitzer deemed them. I venture to say that some of you feel the same way. This is why I believe that those of us teaching and/or aspiring to teach in an evangelical seminary setting should look closely at and try to understand the connection between the historical Jesus and the theological Christ. We sit in a very unique and somewhat difficult position when it comes to exploring/understanding this connection. Faculty at an institution like ours are often involved in the proclamation of Jesus just as much as they are in the instruction or teaching of the historical figure. They can be found preaching Jesus on Sunday and teaching Jesus on Monday to students who then, subsequently, preach Jesus

on Sunday. There is a constant interaction between the lectern and the pulpit and our understanding of that interaction affects not only us, but the students we are responsible for.

The questions that I wish to address in the pages that follow are these: How do you have a foot in both camps, i.e., as one who works as a historian and contributes to the discussion on the historical Jesus *and* one who faithfully proclaims the whole Bible for the whole world and teaches others to do the same? how do you do it with intellectual honesty and integrity all while maintaining an appropriate level of congruency between the two? What are some best practices? There are issues that arise when doing both simultaneously that seem irreconcilable, can you handle these in such a way that the historical Jesus and theological Christ still remain recognizable to one another? In an effort to better illustrate my point I have decided to walk you through a test-case. In the pages that follow we will explore the "The Temptation of Jesus" in its various forms with an eye towards the version in Matthew 4:1-11. We will look at the passage from a variety of angles, but primarily our interest will be in assessing the historical reliability of the text. The reason for choosing this passage is because it has some obvious historical issues, but, it also has had a profound impact on my spiritual life. This will become clearer in the pages that follow.

### **The Temptation of Jesus: A Test Case**

As one of the first episodes relating Jesus's persona to the modern reader of the Gospels, the Matthean temptation narrative is one of considerable familiarity and importance. An antagonist with substantial power and influence is introduced, battle lines are drawn, and Jesus's characteristic wit and wisdom are on full display. The passage itself stands at an important place in the structure of the First Gospel; has an integral role in the depiction of who Jesus was as understood by Matthew; and still has the ability to serve as a powerful corrective for the modern reader.<sup>6</sup>

From a structural standpoint, the pericope serves as one of the final units in a section that is aimed at clearly communicating to the reader the identity of Jesus as perceived by the author.<sup>7</sup> It both brings to a culmination a section by illustrating one of its main thrusts and foreshadows other events in the Gospel which will eventually harken back to it. Regarding its culminating role, within this first section, and prior to the temptation narrative, Matthew refers to Jesus either directly or indirectly as "the Messiah," "Son of David,"

“Son of Abraham,” “Immanuel,” “King of the Jews,” “Ruler,” “shepherd,” “Lord,” and “My beloved Son.” While the many other titles have serious theological implications, the “Son” language appears to be the primary way in which Matthew desires to depict Jesus. Both Kingsbury and Bauer draw attention to the “Son” language and its importance for understanding Matthew’s Christology. Kingsbury points out that by God calling Jesus, “My beloved Son,” in 3:17, it serves as “God’s declaration ... of how he ‘thinks’ about Jesus. *This is the normative understanding of Jesus against which all other understandings are to be measured.*”<sup>8</sup> The temptation narrative plays an important role in further demonstrating just *how* Jesus is God’s Son. Bauer notes that the temptation narrative is a clear illustration of what divine Sonship is supposed to look like. He writes, “Jesus is tempted by Satan, yet he refuses to yield to these temptations, so that he is the Son who perfectly obeys the will of his Father.”<sup>9</sup> Kingsbury says essentially the same, i.e., that in the temptation narrative we find a story about Jesus that is intended to show that he is the son par excellence, who both knows and does the Father’s will.<sup>10</sup>

Benno Przybylski also points out that various elements of the temptation narrative foreshadow other events in the Gospel and the challenge that Satan issues to Jesus regarding him needing to prove that he was the Son of God is ultimately answered in the remainder of the Gospel. He writes,

Through the use of the technique of foreshadowing, Matthew draws attention to three events in his gospel which provide answers to the three temptations. The devil’s challenge, “If you are the Son of God” (Mt 4:3,6), is met. The feedings [foreshadowed by the initial temptation to turn stones into bread], the transfiguration [foreshadowed by Jesus’s baptism and the second temptation] and Jesus’ last appearance [the reference here is to the words of Jesus in Matt 28:18 which were foreshadowed by the third temptation] show that Jesus is indeed the Son of God.<sup>11</sup>

As demonstrated, 4:1–11 plays two important roles as it both concludes an initial section of the Gospel aimed at illuminating who Jesus was while also pointing forward to events that would further demonstrate just how Jesus exemplified the lofty titles attributed to him.

Characterization is an fundamental component of biography and can be achieved in a variety of ways, both directly and indirectly. Authors

of ancient biographies would reveal the character of their subject by both recording their words and deeds or explicitly stating something about the subject in an authorial comment.<sup>12</sup> From a biographical standpoint, the pericope is one of the initial, yet essential, pieces of Matthew's construction of Jesus's character. We meet a Jesus who is subservient to the Spirit, dependent upon the Word of God, filled with wisdom, unwilling to test his Father because he is sincere in his faith in his promises, and unwavering in his allegiances. He is a model by which we should all try to emulate. The quintessential elements of Jesus's character are found here, at the outset, only to be expounded upon throughout the remainder of Matthew's work. It is what we would expect to find in an ancient biography, a genre which aims to reveal the nature of an individual primarily through their words and deeds.

Finally, from this reader's standpoint, what exists here in these eleven verses is a powerful corrective for the modern Christian. Countless times I have returned to this passage to be redirected away from worldly pursuits and back to the sole dependence upon the Word of God. It is far too easy to get entangled in the modern day value system that exalts physical possessions, health, and influence as the "must-haves" for the current season. Reading Jesus's words, "Man shall not live on bread alone, but on every word that proceeds out of the mouth of God," (Matt 4:4, NASB) has been and will continue to be a powerful imperative in my individual spiritual life.<sup>13</sup> Furthermore, to witness Jesus calmly and collectedly face the tempter and come away from it intact, the same tempter who has often left me defeated and with seemingly irreparable damage, gives me hope that at some point in this unending war with that same entity I will be able to do the same.

### *The Historical Dilemma*

Considering the passage, albeit briefly, from a structural, generic, and even spiritual perspective shows the inherent value of the pericope in understanding who Jesus was in the eyes of Matthew as well as how he can influence or direct the human soul in its earthly endeavors. The fact that Matt 4:1–11 is rich with theological truths about our Lord is undeniable. His words, while directed towards the devil, are of immense worth to the modern hearer who is engaged in a conflict with that same adversary.

Having said that, equally as important and necessary given the purpose of this paper is evaluating the pericope from a historical standpoint.

As most of you know, determining the historical reliability of a single passage can be a tricky task. NT scholars are not entirely in agreement as to the best way to go about this, especially if the material is singularly attested. When there is multiple attestation, however, scholars are more likely to be in agreement regarding the historical reliability of that piece of the tradition. Martha Howell and Walter Prevenier, two historians whose focus is solely outside of the New Testament, go so far as saying that if two sources agree on something, historians can “consider it a historical fact.”<sup>14</sup>

With this in mind, the obvious initial step is to determine whether or not any of the tradition in the temptation narrative is found in multiple sources. Of course, this requires a working hypothesis regarding the order in which the Gospels were written and the sources each evangelist used when writing his Gospel. While there are a number of opinions on this matter, the one that I find to have the most explanatory power is the Two-Source Hypothesis, though it is not without its own issues.<sup>15</sup> For those unfamiliar, this theory postulates that Mark wrote his Gospel first, while Matthew and Luke, writing independently of one another, wrote their Gospels using Mark and the hypothetical source Q. This seems to be borne out by what we find in the temptation narrative where Mark provides a brief treatment of the episode and Matthew has an expanded version that appears to rely on both Mark and an additional source, the latter of which is also shared by Luke. Because Matthew is using Mark and Q, and the two are independent of one another, the question then is whether there is any overlap between his two sources.<sup>16</sup> Surprisingly, this is one of the places in the Jesus tradition where there is overlap between Mark and Q.<sup>17</sup> Because of this we are in the unique situation of actually having multiply attested material. The following table displays the Markan and Q material side by side so that one can easily see which aspects of the temptation narrative are found in both sources.

Table 1: *The Temptation Narrative in Mark and Q*

Mark 1:12–13	Q 4:1–4, 9–12, 5–8, 13
<p><sup>12</sup> Immediately the Spirit impelled Him <i>to go out into the wilderness</i>. <sup>13</sup> And He was in the wilderness forty days being tempted by Satan; and He was with the wild beasts, and the angels were ministering to Him.</p>	<p><b>1</b> And Jesus was led[into]the wilderness by the Spirit <b>2</b>[to be]tempted by the devil. And «he ate nothing» for forty days; he became hungry.  <b>3</b> And the devil told him: If you are God's Son, order that these stones become loaves.  <b>4</b> And Jesus answered[him]:It is written; A person is not to live only from bread.  <b>9</b> [The devil] took him along to Jerusalem and put him on the tip of the temple and told him: If you are God's Son, throw yourself down.  <b>10</b> For it is written: He will command his angels about you,  <b>11</b> and on their hands they will bear you, so that you do not strike your foot against a stone.  <b>12</b> And Jesus[in reply]told him: It is written: Do not put to the test the Lord your God.  <b>5</b> And the devil took him along to a[very high]mountain and showed him all the kingdoms of the world and their splendor, <b>6</b> and told him: All these I will give you, <b>7</b> if you bow down before me.  <b>8</b> And[in reply]Jesus told him: It is written: Bow down to the Lord your God, and serve only him.  <b>13</b> And the devil left him.<sup>18</sup></p>



The following list highlights the material that is shared by Mark and Q:

- Jesus's experience in the wilderness was initiated in some capacity by the Spirit.
- The duration of the wilderness excursion was at least forty days.
- Temptation by an adversary occurred.

There is not a tremendous amount of shared material between the two sources, but it would be irresponsible as a historian to say that *nothing* happened.<sup>19</sup> Without too much pushback, one could claim that at some point early in his ministry Jesus had an experience in the wilderness that was lengthy in duration and involved the supernatural to a great extent. Those who argue that the supernatural aspect of the event could not have happened because of it being just that are not being more precise in their historical judgments, just starting with different presuppositions. There are also some significant differences between the two versions:

- For Mark, the temptation took place during the forty days or for the duration of the forty days Jesus was in the wilderness, not after.
- The angels minister to Jesus in Mark, while in Q Jesus rejects their assistance in the midst of one of the Devil's temptations.
- In Mark the tempter is Satan, in Q it is the devil.
- In Mark Jesus was with the wild beasts, while there is no mention of that in Q.

Upon close examination it would appear that the differences between Mark and Q are an indication that Mark was shaping the tradition for theological purposes rather than historical. Scholars have been quick to point out the parallels between the Markan temptation narrative and both the canonical and non-canonical tradition about Adam. Dale Allison explores this in an essay on the historical nature of the temptation narrative, he writes:

In paradise Adam lived in peace with the animals and was guarded by and/or honored by angels. There too he was fed by angels or (according to another tradition) ate the food of angels, manna. But after succumbing to the temptation of the serpent he was cast out (the verb is ἐξέβαλεν in Gen 3:24 LXX).

This sequence of events is turned upside down in Mark. Jesus is first cast out [ἐκβάλλει in Mark 1:12].

Then he is tempted. Then he gains companionship with the animals and the service of angels (which probably includes being fed by them, as in 1 Kings 19:5–8).<sup>20</sup>

It would appear then, as noted above, that these are theologically motivated changes. Changes that we will come to see are an entirely different sort than what the author of Q has done to the tradition he received.

With regards to the portion of the tradition that is unique to Q, it has proven to be far more difficult to assess regarding its historicity. This material falls under the “singularly attested” category mentioned above. In addition to the Q material one also has to assess the redactions Matthew has made to both his sources. This too is singularly attested material and difficult to assess. The following table displays Matthew’s text alongside both Mark and Q for easy comparison.

*Table 2: The Temptation Narrative in the Matthew, Mark, and Q*

Matthew 4:1–11	Mark 1:12–13
<p>1 Then Jesus was led up by the Spirit into the wilderness to be tempted by the devil. 2 And after He had fasted forty days and forty nights, He then became hungry. 3 And the tempter came and said to Him, “If You are the Son of God, command that these stones become bread.” 4 But He answered and said, “It is written, ‘MAN SHALL NOT LIVE ON BREAD ALONE, BUT ON EVERY WORD THAT PROCEEDS OUT OF THE MOUTH OF GOD.’ ” 5 Then the devil took Him into the holy city and had Him stand on the pinnacle of the temple, 6 and said to Him, “If You are the Son of God, throw Yourself down; for it is written, ‘HE WILL COMMAND HIS ANGELS CONCERNING YOU’; and ‘ON their HANDS THEY WILL BEAR YOU UP, SO THAT YOU WILL NOT STRIKE YOUR FOOT AGAINST A STONE.’ ” 7 Jesus said to him, “On the other hand, it is written, ‘YOU SHALL NOT PUT THE LORD YOUR GOD TO THE TEST.’ ” 8 Again, the devil took Him to a very high mountain and showed Him all the kingdoms of the world and their glory; 9 and he said to Him, “All these things I will give You, if You fall down and worship me.” 10 Then Jesus said to him, “Go, Satan! For it is written, ‘YOU SHALL WORSHIP THE LORD YOUR GOD, AND SERVE HIM ONLY.’ ” 11 Then the devil left Him; and behold, angels came and began to minister to Him.</p>	<p>12 Immediately the Spirit impelled Him to go out into the wilderness. 13 And He was in the wilderness forty days being tempted by Satan; and He was with the wild beasts, and the angels were ministering to Him.</p>

	Q 4:1–4, 9–12, 5–8, 13
	<p>1 And Jesus was led [into] the wilderness by the Spirit 2 [to be] tempted by the devil. And «he ate nothing» for forty days; .. he became hungry.</p> <p>3 And the devil told him: If you are God's Son, order that these stones become loaves.</p> <p>4 And Jesus answered [him]: It is written; A person is not to live only from bread.</p> <p>9 [The devil] took him along to Jerusalem and put him on the tip of the temple and told him: If you are God's Son, throw yourself down.</p> <p>10 For it is written: He will command his angels about you,</p> <p>11 and on their hands they will bear you, so that you do not strike your foot against a stone.</p> <p>12 And Jesus [in reply] told him: It is written: Do not put to the test the Lord your God.</p> <p>5 And the devil took him along to a [very high] mountain and showed him all the kingdoms of the world and their splendor, 6 and told him: All these I will give you, 7 if you bow down before me.</p> <p>8 And [in reply] Jesus told him: It is written: Bow down to the Lord your God, and serve only him.</p> <p>13 And the devil left him.</p>

The following list summarizes what is unique to both Q and Matthew. The first six bullet points represent the former, the last two bullet points the latter. I have also labeled each bullet point with the address in both Q and Matthew for quick reference:

- Jesus fasted during his forty days in the wilderness and he became hungry afterwards (Q 4:2).
- Jesus's adversary initially asks him to prove that he is the Son of God by turning stones into bread (Q 4:3).
- Jesus responds to his adversary's initial challenge by quoting Deut 8:3 (Q 4:4).
- Jesus's adversary then leads him to the pinnacle of the temple in Jerusalem and asks him to yet again prove that he is the Son of God, this time by throwing himself off the top and hoping that God sends his angels to keep him from harming himself. Here, the devil refers to Psalm 91:11–12. In his response, Jesus quotes Deut 6:16 (Q 4:9–12).
- Jesus is then tempted with the opportunity to gain immediate sovereignty over all the kingdoms of the world if he simply bows down to the devil. Jesus responds, in both Matthew and Luke, by quoting Deut 6:13a (Q 4:5–8).
- The devil leaves following the three attempts at tempting Jesus (Q 4:13).
- Matthew provides an extended quotation of Deut 8:3, "but on every word that proceeds out of the mouth of God" (Matt 4:4).
- Other minor verbal disagreements between Matthew and his sources throughout, but nothing of consequence.

Matthew has followed his sources, especially Q, incredibly closely, only departing from Q in 4:4 where he extends the Deut 8:3 quotation to include, "but on every word that proceeds out of the mouth of God." There are minor verbal disagreements throughout, but nothing of consequence. Interestingly, he concludes his retelling of the temptations by incorporating a statement provided by Mark (regarding the angels) showing fully his reliance upon the two sources. Matthew's near total replication of his sources simplifies our task, in a sense, in that it limits the amount of singularly attested material we have to assess. However, we are still uncertain about the historicity of a large portion of the temptation

narrative and the assessments made by scholars interested in the passage are not favorable. Furthermore, it really is the main thrust of the temptation narrative that is called into question, or at least unverifiable, and that is most unfortunate considering the observations we have made regarding its inherent value. While it is beneficial on some level to know that Jesus was in the wilderness being tempted and ultimately came through that event, it is the parley between him and the devil that is of the most value for the modern reader.

One of the questions that immediately comes to mind regarding this additional material in Q is why was it not included in Mark if it actually occurred? Mark has no issue with highlighting the adversarial relationship between Jesus and Satan (3:22–7; 8:33), so if what we have in Q is the event in its entirety, and if Mark had knowledge of what actually happened, say from Peter, why does he leave so much out?<sup>21</sup> Furthermore, Mark provides two other episodes that appear to indicate that “demons and unclean spirits [had] supernatural knowledge of Jesus being the ‘Son of God’.”<sup>22</sup> It would seem like a back and forth with Satan about this very thing would undoubtedly have been included if thought to have happened. Of course, if Mark had no knowledge of the additional details found in Q, then the exclusion of that material is certainly not an indictment against its historicity. Technically, neither is Mark’s exclusion of the material even if he *did* have access to it and decided not to include it. It does, however, seem odd given the additional places in his Gospel where he highlights similar themes found in the longer Q version.

That aside, there are additional aspects of the longer version of the temptation narrative that are a cause for concern regarding its historicity. These include the hyperbolic nature of a particular element of the story; the fact that there are known stories that feature a religious founder/hero experiencing a period of trial in early adulthood or at the outset of his career; and the literary design of the narrative that appears to be, much like the shorter Markan version, shaping the tradition for theological purposes rather than historical. These will be addressed in the order they are listed here.

With regards to the first, this was pointed out very early on by patristic interpreters. Origen points out that Matt 4:8 (Q 4:5), which records that the devil took Jesus to a place where they could both observe “all the kingdoms of the world and their glory,” is certainly not meant to be taken literally (*De princ.* 4.16). Theodore of Mopsuestia says the same,

“as to the phrase ‘he showed him,’ it is clear that he did not show him this in substance and reality, since it is impossible to find a mountain so high that from it someone who wishes can see the whole world” (Fragment 22).<sup>23</sup> Even modern commentators, like Craig Blomberg, recognize the impracticability of this mountain top experience. He also points out the unlikelihood of Jesus trekking all the way to Jerusalem in 4:5 given the weakened state he found himself in following a forty day fast.<sup>24</sup> Much like Theodore of Mopsuestia (see n22), Blomberg still allows for the possibility that these were actual experiences of Jesus, just more visionary in nature. An additional possibility is that there was a physical location that they travelled to, but it did not provide a view of *all* the kingdoms, just “a good representative sampling of the nearer kingdoms.”<sup>25</sup> In this instance, the language Q has used, and subsequently Matthew and Luke, to describe the event is intentionally hyperbolic but still has its basis in an actual event. This is clearly within the bounds of how we use language today.

The second point mentioned above is one I find to be interesting, but ultimately it has proven difficult to determine its exact impact or relevance. Dale Allison has compiled a number of examples from antiquity that, in his words, are “fictitious narratives about heroes and religious founders [that] tend to exhibit certain recurring patterns, and among them is the trial that takes place shortly after entering manhood and/or near the beginning of an adult vocation.”<sup>26</sup> He points to the Buddhist tale about Gautama’s battle against Mara, Zoroaster’s encounter with a demon in the wilderness, Gregory Thaumaturgus’s clash with the devil early in his career, Oedipus’s conflict with the Sphinx, Perseus’s battle with a dragon, and Abraham’s supposed confrontation with Azazel on Mt. Horeb.<sup>27</sup> As Allison points out, “who would want to defend the historicity of the stories just referred to ... or posit a factual nucleus behind [them]?”<sup>28</sup>

If we had to single one out that might have had some influence it would probably have to be the tale about Abraham and Azazel on Horeb. Scholars date the composition of the *Apocalypse of Abraham* to ca. 75–150 CE.<sup>29</sup> This is past the time of writing for both Mark and Q, but the possibility that the tradition was passed along orally prior to its fixture in the written tradition should not be dismissed. As Allison goes on to note, within this story we find two elements incredibly similar to what we have in the temptation narrative, a forty-day fast and the assistance of angels (*Apoc. Abr.* 9:1–13:14).<sup>30</sup> Other than these two elements the correspondence is minimal, but those two are significant.

While it is worthwhile to note these parallel stories and explore their contents, it is ultimately too difficult to determine the extent of the awareness, if any, that the author of Q or Mark had of these other ancient tales. One cannot say with any definitiveness if they were even aware of these parallels and if they exerted any influence over the authors in their inclusion or crafting of the temptation narrative. To make any kind of judgement about the historicity of the temptation narrative based on these parallels would be reckless. Is it possible that this pseudepigraphon existed as oral tradition around the time Q was written and it influenced the author to write a similar tale, although much shorter, about Jesus? Yes. Can we say that that was the case with any degree of certainty? No.

Finally, the last aspect that I am going to mention is the seemingly obvious connection between the temptation narrative and portions of Israel's story while they were in the wilderness. The fact that the "son" language, Jesus's temptations, Jesus's responses to those temptations, the duration of the time he spent in the wilderness, etc. map so well with what happened to Israel in the wilderness is, at least in this author's opinion, a cause for concern regarding the historicity of this material. Gibson, following scholars like Dupont, Gerhardsson, and Thompson who came before him, provides his reader with the following list which states the primary ways the temptation narrative and the description of Israel's time in the wilderness, as it is recounted in Deut 6–8, correspond with each other:

1. the basic themes of the Deuteronomistic story (i.e. being led by the [*sic*] God, the wilderness, 'hunger', temptation/testing of God's Son, the necessity of obedience to God's word) are repeated and are given places of prominence in the Q account;
2. the wording of the introduction of the Q account (i.e., Matt 4:1–2// Luke 4:1–2) is reminiscent of that of Deut 8:2 both in the Hebrew and the LXX version of that text;
3. Jesus' temptations are parallel with those to which Israel was subjected according to Deuteronomy 6–8;
4. all of Jesus' responses to the Devil's petitions are derived from this unit of the Deuteronomistic text (Deut 8:2–3; 6:16; 6:13); and
5. the fact that though they appear in Q in reverse order from their sequence in Deuteronomy 6–8, Jesus' quotations from this passage nevertheless correspond to the order of the events to which they refer as recorded in the Old Testament (provision of manna in



the wilderness [Exod. 16], the testing at Massah [Exod 17], the worship of the golden calf [Exod. 32].<sup>31</sup>

As E. P. Sanders has pointed out, with the undeniable correspondence between what we find in Q (and subsequently in Matthew and Luke) and what we find in portions of the OT (Exodus and Deuteronomy) we are left with wondering whether it was Jesus or the early Christians who created the correlations.<sup>32</sup> The unfortunate reality is that we cannot know the answer to that question. Much like the last issue regarding the parallel stories, we are left asking a similar set of questions: Is it possible that the longer version of the temptation narrative represents a historical event that was intentionally set-up to resemble other events in Israel's history? Yes. Is it also possible that the author of Q constructed the temptation narrative in such a way as to show how Jesus is a faithful and obedient son and these manufactured responses to similar temptations that Israel encountered in the wilderness prove that? The answer is also yes. Given the sheer number of correspondences between what we find in Q and Deut 6–8 and portions of Exodus it would appear that the latter is the more likely scenario.

In sum, when it comes to evaluating Matt 4:1-11 for its historical reliability much of what we can say, because he so closely follows his sources, is directly reliant upon our evaluation of those sources. In the process of that evaluation we find a number of issues that call into question the reliability of certain portions of the text. There is, at least in this author's opinion, a historical core that cannot be dismissed. *Something* happened in the wilderness between Jesus and his main adversary. Having said that, beyond the shared material highlighted above there can be no certainty with regards to the reliability of the remaining material. It appears as if the author of Mark and the author of Q took the tradition they received and went about shaping it in different ways to meet their own theological ends. This resulted in one version mimicking to an extent the Adamic tradition and the other that of Israel in the wilderness. In addition, the decision by Mark to not include the extended portion of the temptation narrative is a major red flag. As already noted above, if what we have in Q is what actually happened one would think that Mark would have been familiar with those details if receiving his tradition from Peter (many recognize this as a possibility given the early Church tradition regarding Markan authorship). Given that and the fact that many of the themes in the longer

portion in Q are also present in Mark, the decision to exclude that material is a difficult one to resolve.

## Conclusion

The relationship between biblical studies and the mission of the church is no more on display in both our setting and with regards to this particular topic than anywhere else. We find ourselves in a unique position where we can be teaching both a class on the historical Jesus and on the Gospel of Matthew in the same semester, and those who partake in each are often directly responsible for the teaching of and preaching to those who faithfully attend our churches. In some instances, like the one above, we find ourselves in the difficult position of having to navigate passages that are fraught with difficulties and do it in such a way as to not fracture the relationship between the historical Jesus and the theological Christ. There is no escaping the reality that the two can often appear at odds with one another, or at least at times the historical Jesus can appear drab or without the same color and texture that we find in the portraits painted for us by the evangelists. How do we teach these passages? How do we preach these passages? How do we make sure that our students do the same in a way that is in line with the succinct, yet powerful mission of our institution ... the whole Bible for the whole world? These are the questions that I admittedly do not have all the answers to, but without a doubt will continue to search for. The desire is to have a foot in both camps, both the historical and the theological, but to do it with intellectual honesty, showing an awareness of the issues but not diminishing the theological impact of the text we all hold so dear.

With regards to Matthew 4:1–11 there are a few additional notes I can add that will go towards answering those questions posed above. As I have already noted on at least two occasions there is a historical core that is undoubtedly present in the temptation narrative, but I also believe that the additional material, while not historical in the truest sense of the word, is in fact rooted in the historical Jesus. Nils Dahl provides what I believe to be the correct justification for this position when he writes, “the fact that the word or occurrence found a place within the tradition about Jesus indicates that it agreed with the total picture as it existed within the circle of the disciples.”<sup>33</sup> When examining the larger canonical context of the temptation narrative one can clearly see that the words and actions of Jesus in the temptation narrative are not without their parallels in other

passages. Jesus does and says similar things throughout Matthew and the other Gospels that ultimately substantiate the claim that despite not being a historical event, what is provided in the temptation narrative is consistent with the presentations of the historical figure we find elsewhere. The following list provides multiple points of contact between the temptation narrative and the Jesus tradition we find in other Gospels:

1. Q 4:1-13 and Mark 1:12-13 describe a situation in which Jesus was ultimately victorious over Satan. This is found in numerous other places throughout the Gospels as Jesus is consistently depicted as one who was a successful exorcist.
2. The initial temptation is for Jesus to perform a miracle in the turning of a stone into bread to relieve his personal hunger. It is assumed here by Satan that Jesus was able to perform miracles. This certainly coheres with the greater portion of Jesus tradition as it is clear that he both saw himself as a miracle worker and performed them on numerous occasions.
3. Jesus's refusal to perform miracles in the temptation narrative is also consistent with other passages in the Jesus tradition (see Q 11:29-30; Mark 8:11-13).
4. Jesus quotes scripture throughout the temptation narrative. The tradition is flush with examples of Jesus showing his awareness and use of scripture in a variety of situations.
5. There is no doubt that Jesus places great faith in God in the temptation narrative. He does not succumb to the temptations because he knows that God will provide for him in the way he sees fit and in his timing. There are a number of other places in the tradition that feature Jesus showing great faith that God will take care of him (Q 11:3, 9-13, 12:24).
6. Jesus turns down Satan's offer to make him king in the temptation narrative. We find a similar instance in John 6 indicating that it is likely that Jesus faced a similar experience in his life to what is found in Matt 4:8-9.<sup>34</sup>

Hopefully, what the above points demonstrate is that when dealing with a passage where there are decided historical issues, finding points of contact with other Jesus tradition is a viable way to move forward. We do not want to ignore the historical issues, but we are not overstating

our claim when we say that the temptation narrative is not depicting a Jesus altogether unfamiliar to his earliest followers. The theological shaping of the tradition by the authors who handled the Jesus tradition early on is not devoid of historical reminiscences. We can teach and preach the passage with the confidence that the author was utilizing his editorial brilliance in an effort to demonstrate the true character of Jesus as he, along with the others closest to him, had experienced it.

## End Notes

<sup>1</sup> James Carleton Paget, "The Religious Authority of Albert Schweitzer's Jesus," in *Scripture's Doctrine and Theology's Bible: How the New Testament Shapes Christian Dogmatics*, ed. Markus Bockmuehl and Alan J. Torrance (Grand Rapids: Baker Academic, 2008), 75–90.

<sup>2</sup> Quote taken from Paget, "Schweitzer," 84, but can also be found in Albert Schweitzer, *The Quest of the Historical Jesus*, ed. John Bowden, trans. W. Montgomery et al., 1st complete ed. (Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 2001), 402.

<sup>3</sup> Paget, "Schweitzer," 78. Paget notes that this particular statement is found in a letter from Schweitzer to Alfred Boegner, the director of the Paris Missionary Society.

<sup>4</sup> Paget, "Schweitzer," 78.

<sup>5</sup> Schweitzer, *Quest*, 480.

<sup>6</sup> I will use "Matthew" in reference to the author of the Gospel freely, but this is not a claim as to who actually authored the Gospel. The authorship question as it relates to the First Gospel is fairly complicated and the percentage chance that Matthew authored the Gospel in its entirety is fairly low.

<sup>7</sup> I am aware of the fact that "structure" in Matthew's Gospel is entirely dependent upon the method of the individual seeking to determine it. I have chosen to follow the conclusions of David R. Bauer in his work *The Structure of Matthew's Gospel: A Study in Literary Design*, JSNTS 31, Biblical and Literature Series 15 (Sheffield: Almond Press; Sheffield: Sheffield Academic, 1988). Bauer assesses the structure of Matthew's Gospel in a more thorough way than previous attempts by looking at a variety of features in the work.

<sup>8</sup> Jack Dean Kingsbury, "The Figure of Jesus in Matthew's Story: A Literary-Critical Probe," *JSNT* 21 (1984): 3–36 (emphasis mine).

<sup>9</sup> Bauer, *Structure*, 143.

<sup>10</sup> Kingsbury, "Figure," 11.

<sup>11</sup> Benno Przybylski, "The Role of Matthew 3:13–4:11 in the Structure and Theology of the Gospel of Matthew," *BTB* 4 (1974) 222–35.

<sup>12</sup> Thomas Hägg, *The Art of Biography in Antiquity* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2012), 5.

<sup>13</sup> All English translations of the Synoptic material will be from the NASB.

<sup>14</sup> Martha Howell and Walter Prevenier, *From Reliable Sources: An Introduction to Historical Methods* (Ithaca, NY: Cornell University Press, 2001), 70. See also, F. C. Burkitt, *The Gospel History and Its Transmission*, 3d ed. (Edinburgh: T&T Clark, 1911). Burkitt was the first to advocate for the use of the criterion of multiple attestation in historical Jesus research. I agree with his assessment that those instances of multiple attestation in the Jesus tradition are probably the most reliable (147). His work used the criterion to make judgments about Jesus's sayings but it certainly can be used to make judgments regarding other material as well.

<sup>15</sup> For a helpful examination of the various source theories and an endorsement of the Two-Source Hypothesis, see Robert H. Stein, *Studying the Synoptic Gospels: Origin and Interpretation*, 2d ed. (Grand Rapids: Baker, 2001).

<sup>16</sup> I understand Mark and Q to be independent of one another. There is considerable debate on this very issue and in regards to this very text. Jeffrey B. Gibson provides a thorough treatment of the overlap and independence of both Mark and Q as it relates to the temptation narrative; see *Temptations of Jesus in Early Christianity*, JSNTS 112 (Sheffield: Sheffield Academic, 1995), 37–41. I am following his conclusions here although I do not agree with him that the Markan and Q version of the temptation narrative derives from a shared source. There is zero evidence of this apart from the fact that they share a core of similar material. We are already making decisions based on one hypothetical source, no need to invent yet another.

<sup>17</sup> For additional places where scholars think this occurs see Christopher M. Tuckett, *Q and the History of Early Christianity: Studies on Q* (Peabody, MA: Hendrickson, 1996), 31.

<sup>18</sup> James M. Robinson, Paul Hoffmann, and John S. Kloppenborg, eds., *The Critical Edition of Q: Synopsis Including the Gospels of Matthew and Luke, Mark and Thomas with English, German, and French Translations of Q and Thomas*, Hermeneia (Minneapolis: Leuven: Fortress Press; Peeters, 2000), 22–40. The hypothetical nature of Q complicates matters and that cannot be overstated. In the critical edition used above scholars have worked to isolate what they believe to be the essential Q minus any of the redactional elements attached by Matthew or Luke. It is not perfect, but it is the best attempt at reproducing Q so far and for that reason will have to

do in a discussion such as this. One just needs to recognize the hypothetical nature of the source and the imperfections undoubtedly present in any attempt at reproducing it.

<sup>19</sup> Again, one could argue that Mark and Q were ultimately aware of or working with a shared source. There is zero evidence of this and there are far more places where the two sources depart from one another than there are shared pieces of the Jesus tradition. One would think that if they were working with a shared source it would be the opposite.

<sup>20</sup> Dale C. Allison, Jr., "Behind the Temptations of Jesus: Q 4:1–13 and Mark 1:12–13," in *Authenticating the Activities of Jesus*, ed. Bruce Chilton and Craig A. Evans (Boston: Brill, 2002), 195–213. The above quote can be confusing if one does not consult Allison's footnotes, see pp 196–99 and all notes therein. He parses out which points are present in the non-canonical tradition and which are part of the OT.

<sup>21</sup> Peter's influence on the Gospel of Mark is a real possibility given the early Church tradition regarding the authorship of the work.

<sup>22</sup> Petr Pokorny, "The Temptation Stories and Their Intention," *NTS* 20 (1974): 115–27. Pokorny points to Mark 3:11 and 1:24.

<sup>23</sup> The Theodore of Mopsuestia quote was taken from Manlio Simonetti, ed., *Matthew 1–13*, Ancient Christian Commentary on Scripture: New Testament 1A (Downers Grove: InterVarsity Press, 2001), 62. Theodore would argue however that the event did take place, it was made possible by the devil having the capability to show Jesus some sort of imaginary image that they could both view rather than having to be in a physical location to do so.

<sup>24</sup> Craig Blomberg, *Matthew*, NAC 22 (Nashville: Broadman & Holman, 1992), 85n81.

<sup>25</sup> Craig S. Keener, *The Gospel of Matthew: A Socio-Rhetorical Commentary* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2009), 141. Keener points to OT passages such as Gen 13:14–15 and Deut 34:1–4 where individuals were in high places that allowed them to observe numerous places at once.

<sup>26</sup> Dale C. Allison, Jr., "Behind the Temptations of Jesus: Q 4:1–13 and Mark 1:12–13," in *Authenticating the Activities of Jesus*, ed. Bruce Chilton and Craig A. Evans (Boston: Brill, 2002), 195–213.

<sup>27</sup> *Ibid.*, 205.

<sup>28</sup> *Ibid.* In addition to Allison's parallels, Gibson lists some others that are worth exploring; see Gibson, *Temptations*, 84–5.

<sup>29</sup> R. Rubinkiewicz, "Apocalypse of Abraham," in *The Old Testament Pseudepigrapha: Volume One, Apocalyptic Literature and Testaments*, ed. James H. Charlesworth (Peabody, MA: Hendrickson, 2016), 683.

<sup>30</sup> Allison, Jr., "Temptations," 205n44.

<sup>31</sup> Gibson, *Temptations*, 85. While Gibson's summary of what previous scholars have found is helpful, it is Gerhardsson's work that has proven to be the one most other scholars are forced to interact with; see *The Testing of God's Son (Matt 4:1–11 & Par): An Analysis of Early Christian Midrash, Chapters 1–4*, CB-NTS 2 (Lund: C.W.K. Gleerup, 1966).

<sup>32</sup> E. P. Sanders, *The Historical Figure of Jesus* (London: Penguin Press, 1993), 112.

<sup>33</sup> N. A. Dahl, *The Crucified Messiah and Other Essays* (Minneapolis: Augsburg, 1974), 67. I originally came across this quote in the essay by Dale Allison that I have been interacting with throughout this paper; see Allison, Jr., "Temptations," 207–8.

<sup>34</sup> Allison, Jr., "Temptations," 207–11.